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A CENTURY OF

SCOTTISH PROVERBS AND SAYINGS,

IN PROSE AND RHYME,

CURRENT IN FIFE AND CHIEFLY OF FIFE ORIGIN.

COLLECTED AND SELECTED BY

Æ. J. G. MACKAY,

Sheriff of the Counties of Fife and Kinross.

A. WESTWOOD & SON, CUPAR-FIFE.

"Cost wit is the best wit."—SCOTTISH PROVERB.

"Bang gangs saxpence."—SCOTTISH SAYING.

PRINTERS
WESTWOOD
AND SON.
CUPAR-FIFE

"I have for my recreation collected some few of them; therein favouring the old; not omitting any because they are vulgar (for many vulgar ones are excellent good), nor for the meanness of the person, but because they are dull and flat; and added new that otherwise would have died."

LORD BACON (slightly altered).

"It is well known that every nation hath their own Proverbs and Proverbial Speeches; *yea, every shire or part of a nation hath some Proverbial Speeches which others hath not:* so that a man can hardly gather together all such speeches."

The Printer to the Merry, Judicious, and Discreet Reader of the Proverbs of Mr David Ferguson, sometime Minister of Dunfermline, and put into an alphabetical order after he departed this life, 1598.

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7 Albyn Place, Edinburgh,
Easter Vacation, 1891.

My dear Dr Laing,

In sending you this trifle I should like to say how much besides Proverbs I have learnt from your writings and conversation about Fife and its natives. Neither of my friends nor myself forget the day you guided us over the ruins of Lindores Abbey, whose fragments your piety has restored, past the site of Macduff's Cross, not so fortunate in finding a preserver, through the grounds of Mugdrum, whose Cross still stands, and on to the venerable Tower of Abernethy. If I venture to place your name without leave before this brief record of some Sayings of Fife which have become proverbial, it is because I feel sure you will not despise any contribution, however small, to the knowledge of a County which recognises you as one of its best living representatives.

Yours very truly,

Æ. J. G. MACKAY.

Alexander Laing, Esq., LL.D.,
Newburgh.

SCOTTISH PROVERBS,

MOSTLY OF FIFE ORIGIN.

ALL countries and districts which have character have proverbs—the happy or lucky sayings that are so neatly expressed that they pass from mouth to mouth, from generation to generation. The best proverbs are true and witty; sometimes they are witty, but not true; sometimes they are true, but not witty; sometimes even neither true nor witty; but they always have "salt," the quality which gives zest and preserves from decay. Once heard they are remembered, however bad our memory. Men quote them who quote little else. They live after their origin, often after their meaning is lost. They make us think; they make us laugh; they recall a place or character, a custom or a word, which otherwise might be forgotten. They have the flavour of antiquity yet the freshness of novelty. A new proverb is a paradox, almost an impossibility. Its birth must be distant before its life is assured.

Not long ago a widely-circulated author, whose

volumes lay on the tables of many well-furnished drawing-rooms, where books are never read, wrote many thousand verses, called "Proverbial Philosophy," but Mr Martin Tupper never succeeded in making a proverb. The first living novelist in the opinion of good judges has a commonplace book of unborn proverbs, which he brings out at intervals in his thoughtful novels, but these apothegms are skipped by the readers and forgotten even by the admirers of Mr George Meredith. Mr Andrew Lang has propounded the heresy that any one can make a proverb. Let him try. It is as difficult to make a proverb as a parable. One of the best known Scottish sayings is that of Fletcher of Saltoun—"Let me make the songs, and no matter who makes the laws." It could not have run, Let me make the proverbs. Proverbs are generally the work of unknown authors; they are the property of no one, or rather of everyone—the common stock of the people. All proverbs, but specially local proverbs, are like the epigrams of the Roman satirist—good, bad, and indifferent. We must not make too much of them, or expect too much from them, but take them for what they are worth. Their chief value is that they reveal in sudden, unexpected ways the character of those who made and repeat them.

"The Kingdom" has a good soil for proverbs. Its separate bounds between the striking natural frontiers of the Sea—the Firths and the Ochils—have contained since early times so many centres of different kinds of work, thought, and speech. At Kirkcaldy, for example, the progressive town of the East Coast, we are separated from the quaint old burgh of Dysart, the Little Holland of the 17th century, only by Lord Rosslyn's grounds, within which the ruins of Ravenscraig, resisting even neglect and decay, witness to the strong architecture of the Jameses, built to resist the new artillery. We are not far from the Caves of Wemyss, one of which contains the oldest chiselled symbols of early Christianity, and another served in the 17th century as the first Glass Work of Scotland. Hard by are the fragments of the ruined tower of the old Earls of Fife. Within a few miles inland still stands the old Castle of Balwearie, and its fine old trees with branches like stags' horns, where Michael Scot lived, the most famed wizard of Scotland after Thomas of Ercildoune. Some stones may still be seen of the Grange, from which the gallant soldier who derived his name from the town was better known as the Laird of Grange. We are surrounded by the more recent memories of the salt pans, mills, brew-

houses, and havens, the spinning and weaving villages which have grown into a prosperous centre of manufacture. Or change the scene from the shores of the Forth to the banks of the Tay. At Newburgh we are within walking distance of Abernethy, with its venerable Round Tower, the ancient seat of Pictish kings and bishops; of Auchtermuchty, once a small but wealthy agricultural township, then a thriving spinning town, whose looms are now nearly silent; of the ruined Palace and the buried Tower of Falkland; of Freuchie, once despised by Falkland, on whose decay it now looks down; and of Auld Lindores, with its deserted cloister but still living orchards. Each of these, and a hundred other places throughout the county, have special and varied characteristics of the past, with a separate life even to-day which raise reflections and give birth to proverbs.

Without taking the license of our Gaelic kin, who call every quaint or pithy saying a proverb, it is better not to limit ourselves to any strict definition. We shall not count it either necessary or enough that it should be a good saying; what the French, adepts in such sayings, call *a mot* or *bon mot*. But we shall be satisfied if it is short and pithy, and remembered by the people. This last is the test of

the proverb, that it lives in the memory and on the lips of the people; that it loses, like a good story, some of its flavour when it is written down.

It is natural to begin with what concerns the whole County. *The Kingdom* is itself very nearly, if not quite, a proverb. It would be rejected by the scientific collector, but comes within the more popular description here adopted. It certainly possesses most of the qualities. It is old, it is brief, it is never forgotten, its origin is lost. We have historical knowledge of the Earl and the Sheriff, and poetical, though not historical knowledge of the Thane of Fife of whom Tennant sung. But when and where within its bounds was there a single King who held it as his Kingdom? Did he reign at Cupar, or at Falkland, or at Wemyss; at Inchrye, the King's Meadow; or at Kilrymount, the King's Mount, or were these the residences, now the reminiscences, of the chief vassal kinglets? There have been Kings of Scotland, or of the Scots, who have built castles and palaces, and lived and died in Fife, but they never were called Kings of Fife. There were before them in the dim distance Pictish Kings of whom we know scarcely more than the names, a few doubtful dates and unintelligible epithets—the Drusts, and Brudes, and Nechtans; but to none of

these is the title of King of Fife given. There were the old Celtic chiefs, the Macduffs, whom the Wemysses claim to represent, who became its Earls. They boast an ancient lineage, and would gladly, like an Irish M'Dermot or O'Connell, believe they had a King as a progenitor, but they have never found one in their genealogies, however laboriously constructed. Fife must be content to be a Kingdom without a King. Some of its natives might be pleased with this distinction, as a triumphant democrat who a short time ago at Dundee declared he visited with pleasure the burial places of Kings, but learnt better manners when he got to Inverness, where he paid a tardy homage to the virtue of a living Queen. It may be one of the eccentricities of Fife that the inhabitants are fond of the name of "The Kingdom." It is a common bond. It might be a toast, as the "*Aucht and Forty Davachs of Huntly*" in Aberdeenshire, "*The Sons of Clach-na-Cudden*" in Inverness, or "*All Round the Wrekin*'" in Shropshire. It means the County and all the good people in it. These good people have given themselves the name of Fifers, which also just misses being a proverb in the strict sense, and expresses, perhaps, as much as six letters can. It would be rash to attempt to translate it into long-winded

English. There is a proverb, however, which makes the attempt, and a proverb which carries a good deal of forgotten history—

"*To be a Fifer is not far off from being a Highlandman.*"

Was it a proud Gael who first uttered this proverb, which may seem to imply that the Fife man was not quite so good as a Highlander, or was it a conceited Edinburgh citizen of the days when a Highlander was deemed either a robber or a beggar—no welcome sight in the Southern City. Or is the more correct form of the saying,

"*If you're Heelant you are next door to the Fifer?*"

in which case it may be feared the conceit belongs to the Fife side of the Highland border, to the same pride which dictated the proverb,

"*They that sup with Fife folk maun hae a lang spune.*"

Apart from these fancies, this saying preserves in proverbial form the fact written at large on the topography of Fife, that the population of a County which is now as a whole Lowland rather than Highland in character was originally Celtic, speaking a

dialect of the Gaelic tongue, honouring the Celtic Saints, using the old Celtic ritual, following the customs of the old Celtic law as at Macduff's Cross, wearing the Celtic garb, playing the pipes, and singing to their tunes. Even later the dress which still lingers in the Highlands might be seen in Fife. The white frilled mutch was worn by the old women of Fife, the homespun frieze by the men. The bonny lassies drew the snooded shawl over their fair hair, and the braw lads cocked their bonnets when they went to woo, till the last generation introduced London or Paris hats and bonnets. The piper was to be found in many of the towns, and young and old danced the Highland Fling or Strathspeys when he played on Falkland Green or Anster Loan. All this is ancient history, only fit to be embalmed in an old proverb. No part of Scotland save the Lowlands proper seems now less akin to the Gael or less familiar with his peculiar usages. Yet when we penetrate beneath the surface, in spite of the settlement of many Saxons and Normans, some Frenchmen and Flemings, and perhaps a few Danes and Dutchmen, there remains in the Fife character its humour and queerness, its clannishness and attachment to the soil—something which in a measure, though in a decreasing measure, justifies the proverb

that to be a Fifer is not so far off from being a Highlandman. Whoever studies the faces and figures in Wilkie's "Pitlessie Fair" or "The Rent Day" will ask himself more than once whether he is not looking at men and old women of Celtic race. A great artist, like a great poet, often sees further than an ordinary man. The Fifers of a bygone day were known in Princes Street—or the High Street before there was any Princes Street—by the salt water on their hats, and were the subject of many proverbs, of which the best describes their estates—

"*A puckle land, a lump of debt, a doocot, and a law plea,*"

and the worst satirizes them as

"*Aye daft and maistly drunk, and what they want in sense they have in greed.*"

But Lady Nairne makes a humorous apology or defence for the Fife Laird in one of her songs:—

"Ye shouldna ca' the Laird daft, tho' daft like he may be;
Ye shouldna ca' the Laird daft, he's just as wise as we;
Ye shouldna ca' the Laird daft, his bannet has a bee;
He's just a wee bit Fifish, like some Fife Lairds that be."

After the County the capital claims place. Of all the proverbs of Fife

"*Who will to Cupar maun to Cupar*"

has probably had the widest circulation. It certainly has the merit of antiquity. If it had been made in modern times it might perhaps have run the other way, "*Who won't to Cupar won't to Cupar.*" We have become in some respects less active than our forefathers. In the days of the Jameses and Queen Mary no one thought anything about a walk or a ride from Dunfermline or Falkland to Kirkcaldy or Cupar. But now in this faster age of railways—if in Fife we may yet call it a faster age—Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy require their own Courts; Auchtermuchty and Newburgh, and even Anstruther and St Andrews, like to settle their own small debts, of which, fortunately there are few, within sight of their own doors. It is generally assumed that this proverb has something to do with the resort to Cupar as the seat of justice. George Buchanan expresses this view when he describes Cupar as "a place in the middle region of the County where the rest of the people of Fife go to get justice." This also is assumed in a popular addition to the proverb, "*Who will to Cupar maun to Cupar*"—"*Aye better gang than be taen.*" If, as the last suggestion implies, the proverb had a special reference to the penalties of

the law, the Prison Commissioners have falsified it. No one can now by going to Cupar find lodgings there at the Queen's expense. Yet it was a proverb in Fife,

"*There is nae shamming in Johnny Brand's house*," (Cupar Jail)

which is perhaps not so applicable to the larger Prisons of Edinburgh or Dundee or the Penitentiary of Perth. Such readings of the proverb are surely much too limited. Perhaps the true meaning is "Whoever sets his heart on going to the capital—to London or Edinburgh, or in the Kingdom of Fife to Cupar—will manage to get there whether bent on business or pleasure. It is the local variety of the English proverb—"*The wilful man will have his way.*" But it is superior to the English saying, because it does not exclude women, who sometimes get their own way. It has, besides, the advantage of the good old Scotch word "maun," which it may preserve after it has been lost in common speech. It is a word which expresses a good deal more than "will" or even than "must," and, like many words of the Scots vernacular, cannot easily be turned into English. And so this proverb requires a second English proverb—"*Where there is a will there is a*

way," to express the Fife one. It conveys the hint that whoever wishes to go to Cupar or any other place must take the means of getting there on foot if he cannot ride. It is a warning, too, that, after all, the wilful man does not invariably have his way ; indeed, seldom gets it unless he exerts himself, not always when he does. Whatever it means, may Cupar long keep the distinction of this proverb. A Kingdom may exist without a King, and become a Republic. No Country or County can well exist without a centre, in which men from different parts have a common meeting-place, from which intelligence comes and goes, and in which authority has its seat. It need not be the richest or the busiest place. It is often difficult to decide between rival claims. It is well when it is settled, as in Fife, by a proverb.

Cupar has a place in another proverb, which recalls one of the chief industries of Fife—

"*Auchtermuchty, Auchtermuchty, payment by piece.*
Cupar o' Fife, Cupar o' Fife, payment by time."

When did this saying originate? Possibly when the handloom was being superseded by the power-loom, and Auchtermuchty stuck to the old style,

while Cupar began to adopt the new; or was Cupar in advance of the times, paying even its handloom weavers by the day? If the weavers of Auchtermuchty worked slowly, and on that account turned out perhaps all the better webs, its herds had an opposite character, for it was said of them—

"*Hindmest awa' and first hame, like the herds of Auchtermuchty.*"

The binders of Blebo had a similar bad character for dilatoriness, which is preserved in the saying—

"*As far behind as the Bandsters of Blebo,*"

who were often out of sight of the shearers.

Another proverb of the neighbourhood of Cupar is a puzzle which local inquiry has not helped to solve. Did

"*Springfield holidays*"

mean that in Springfield it was all holidays, or that there were no holidays, or, as has been suggested, is it a modern proverb which relates to the long, sad holidays spent in the asylum? If so, it has lost its force, for improved treatment and higher skill have discovered that work is the best medicine

to ward off and to cure the maladies of the mind. One sees in this case a proverb may fail sometimes by excess of brevity, and the saying will die, or is perhaps already dead. The parish of Cults had also a proverb of its own—

"*Seek a hole for yoursel' like Tammas Young's bairns.*"

Tammas was a beadle in Cults, with a large family, who, after the wife had undressed the bairns, was wont to pitch them into the box bed saying "Seek a hole for yoursel'." Cameron parish had also its own saying when its minister was Mr Mair—

"*Cameron kirk is muckle but the minister is Mair;*"

and so had Monimail in the proverb, whose meaning is lost,

"*Turn your tail to Tarvit and your face to Monimail.*"

These proverbs, most likely half forgotten in Fife, have been sent me by Mr James Scott, from Valley Falls, Kansas, United States, who describes himself as a laddie who "paidled in the burn at Cults." Another proverb of the spinning trade, the product perhaps of Dunfermline or Kirkcaldy rivalry, re-

proaches the cloth of Cupar—

"*As coarse as Cupar harn, three threads to a pund, and each pund an oxterfull.*"

Next to Cupar we may turn to its wealthier sisters of the East and West—Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline. Kirkcaldy and its suburbs have produced as many proverbs as any locality in Fife. The "*Lang Toon*" has made itself into a proverb. "Kirkcaldy the sell o't," said Andrew Fairservice, "is as long as any town in England." There was some patriotic exaggeration in this claim, but Kirkcaldy is and has long been celebrated as the long town of Scotland. It is a proud boast, for most towns in Scotland are long rather than broad. The form in which the Scottish burgesses in old times built their burghs is indeed matter of more than antiquarian curiosity. It is a point in Scottish history. The old Scottish towns were not walled except Berwick and Perth, the frontier towns of the English and Highland borders. Edinburgh only got its wall after Flodden. There are no towns like York or Chester, Roman Camps which became fortified cities. The chief Scottish towns owed their defence to a castle which towered from its rocky eminence over the streets, as in Edin-

burgh, Stirling, Dumbarton, Inverness. They were perhaps protected also by their poverty, which made a Scotch town in old days hardly worth pillage. The burgh lay open to the country side, where its citizens cultivated their burgh acres and combined rural with municipal pursuits. The houses were built fronting or in some cases gable end to the main road, which became the High Street, running East and West, North and South as the situation dictated. The houses had often common gables, a fertile source of lawsuits, and in other cases were separated by common entries or closes running to the back premises and connecting them with another street nearly parallel to the High Street, as the Cowgate of Edinburgh, through which the cows went from their byres to the town Meadows, or in the seacoast towns fronting the sea, and often called The Shore. Population and trade increasing, the coveted sites were those which entered on the High Street. New building was either upwards, as in the Edinburgh tenements—called lands, partly because the flats were modelled after the French Etages, but chiefly owing to the High Street being restricted to the short mile between the Canongate and the Castle. In Kirkcaldy, where there was no such limitation, the

buildings gradually stretched along the High Street, on both sides of the Market Cross and the Harbour. Another cause common to many towns, but especially noticeable in Kirkcaldy, which directed the lengthening of the line of building, instead of making cross streets and squares, was that the town lay on an ancient sea-level or raised beach, the narrow margin of flat ground between the sea, to which easy access was advantageous, and the brae or hillside beyond. And so it came about that Kirkcaldy is pre-eminently *The Lang Toon*. Determined to deserve the name acquired, when it was a fishing and shipping port before and a manufacturing town after the Union, but still only a little more than a mile long in the beginning of the eighteenth century, it is now three or four, and has absorbed Sinclairtown, Pathhead and Gallatown, Inverteil and Linktown. The fame of its staple trade has spread over the Continent and across the Atlantic. But what might not be so readily expected, it is also known abroad by one of its proverbs. When the German historian Pauli, whose head was as full of knowledge as his heart of kindness, was on a visit to Edinburgh, his host invited him to Fife, saying, with a laugh, "I don't believe you know that County or anything about Kirkcaldy, the most

famous of its East Coast towns." "Don't I," said Pauli, "don't I," with a twinkle of his bright eye,

"'*Some say the deil's deid and buried in Kirkcaldy!*'"

Whatever may be the other merits of this saying or the virtues of Kirkcaldy, this must be counted, it may be feared, one of the proverbs which are not true. A doubt is perhaps intended to be expressed by the "some say" of the proverb. Or is Kirkcaldy more fortunate than all the rest of the world in having buried the great adversary of man? Scarcely, if another saying is veracious, that a stranger, hearing the text, from the Psalms of David, read by Mr Shirra, its well-known United Presbyterian minister, "I said in my haste all men are liars," exclaimed—

"*Aye, David, had you been in the Lang Toon you might hae said it at your leisure.*"

But this, no doubt, was the malice of some one who had made a bad bargain in the market. An addition to this proverb, indeed, itself casts doubt upon the reality of the Devil's death and burial, for it proceeds—

"*Some say the deil's up again and dancing Highland Laddie.*"

Surely this must have been the version of some stern Covenanter or sour Whig, who applied it to Prince Charlie as Sir Walter Scott did to Napoleon after his escape from Elba. Another proverb of Kirkcaldy relates to an incident of the time when the cross, which may now be seen on many Established and even the bonny U. P. Kirks of which Mr Stevenson writes, was deemed idolatrous—

"*Kirkcaldy puir people*
Took down the Cross to build the Steeple."

But this reproach was not peculiar to Kirkcaldy. The Cross of Cupar was removed from the market place to the Hill of Tarvit, and the Cross of Edinburgh was till lately cast among the rubbish at the base of St Giles.

Pathhead, the chief continuation of Kirkcaldy, seems to have been an object while it continued separate of jealousy both to its town and country neighbours. Such, at least, seems the drift of several proverbs which attached to it.

"*Your like Pathhead folk, you look long afore you,*"

is one of these, and is explained by some to mean that the people of that town thought themselves

shrewder than they were, and by others that they anticipated the Hansel Monday holiday before it became due.

"*You'll come down the hill yet, like Pathhead folk,*"

is a plainer saying, reflecting on their local situation and failures in business, and hinting that they would need to come down to Kirkcaldy for help. There remains the most mysterious of the local proverbs of Fife—

"*Pickletillem to Pathhead,*
Ilka Bailie burns anither."

The first line probably refers to a farm of that name in the neighbourhood of Pathhead, and is one, not three words, as Mr Robert Chambers prints it, which gave rise to many misleading guesses. Such a guess probably is the explanation that the proverb applies to the Pathhead nailers, who could not make out their quota of work without getting a pickle added. But what the second line means is a greater puzzle, which must be left to local antiquaries, with the remark of Mr Chambers, that "the meaning of the reproach is beyond reach,

but till a late period its effect in irritating the good people of Pathhead was indubitable."

Dunfermline is not so well off for proverbs as Kirkcaldy, but it produced the first of many collections of Scottish proverbs, the work of its minister, Mr David Ferguson, who compiled it in 1598, though it was not published till 1644. One saying of Dunfermline origin,

"*The deil has cussin his cloke aboot the bairn*,"

is said to have been spoken by James VI. when the nurse of Charles I. awoke him with a tale of an apparition beside the cradle of his child. But that monarch, who was so proud of his good sayings, would no doubt prefer to be remembered by the better known one describing the County as

"*A beggar's mantle with a fringe of gold.*"

Mr Addison, now of the *Trowbridge Advertiser*, to whom I am indebted for a friendly communication, recalls another saying,

"*I'll no tak aff my breeks till I gang to my bed*,"

as current in Dunfermline; and he adds others as well known to him in his younger days in that town.

Some are common elsewhere, but the following are new to me and worth preserving:—

"*Your wind shakes nae corn*,"

"*Flee laigh*," and

"*Wha sits on a stane is twice fain; fain to sit down and fain to rise up.*"

"*Torryburn Hail*"

is a modern Dunfermline saying for a one-sided game, as the Torryburn lads usually won every game in the shinty matches.

"*Ye'er not aye gaun to the kirk when ye gang doon the Kirkgate*"

is another which is perhaps not exclusively applicable to Dunfermline. Two proverbs of the weaving trade are remembered by old residents of Dunfermline,

"*He'll neither hap nor wind*,"

and

"*Keep a hasp in your ain hand*,"

which sufficiently explain their meaning.

If Dunfermline has comparatively few proverbs, Falkland, the other Royal Palace of Fife, makes up for it. Most of its proverbs are allusions to the Court and courtiers.

"*To be Falkland bred*"

meant to be a courtier.

"*Your queer folk no to be Falkland folk,*"

was the retaliation of some witty country-bred man to a set of people he knew quite well hailed from Falkland, and who were giving themselves airs.

"*To go to Freuchie and,*"

as is sometimes added,

"*fry frogs,*"

was to get into disgrace and be banished from Court. The addition may possibly refer to this fate having befallen a French favourite. It is the Scotch for *to be sent to Coventry*, like the North country proverb *to go to Banff and buff ben' leather.*"

"*You won't cut the woods of Falkland with a penknife*"

is a saying which must be of early date, before

its fine trees, which had escaped the demands of the Scottish Navy, had fallen under the axes of the soldiers of Cromwell and of Charles. It is to be found in Ferguson's collection.

"*The King may come the Cadger's gate*"

is probably a proverb of Falkland origin, and may be taken in more than one sense.

"*Like is an ill mark*"

is said to be a proverb of Falkland, a warning against the use of comparisons, parallels, and similies, perhaps because its natives did not care to be compared to those of any other place. When Falkland had fallen from its high estate as the Royal Court it still retained its municipal honours. The

"*Bailie's coo,*"

if not a proverb, deserves to be one. Her master, when he visited her byre somewhat elevated after his election, greeted her—"Ah, Crummie, Crummie, ye're nae common coo now: ye're a Bailie's coo, my man."

"*Like draws to like*"

is one of the proverbs which is the common property of many places and countries. But the addition,

"*Like an auld horse to a fail (feal) dyke*,"

gives it a peculiar Scotch, perhaps Fifish turn.

"*Blood without suet mak's puir puddin's*,"

and

"*Better half an egg than a toom doup*,"

are two proverbs of the kitchen which were current in Fife, and belong to the cottage, not to the palace. But it is remarkable that so few of the proverbs in Ferguson's collection have any local colour. Many of them are indeed mere translations of Latin adages.

It may be convenient to note the proverbs of the other East Coast towns before crossing to Tayside or making an excursion into the interior of the County. Dysart at one time came next to Kirkcaldy in the currency of its proverbs, though they are for the most part now antiquated.

"*As old as the three trees of Dysart*"

was remembered when there was only one, but now it is gone, and the saying is probably forgotten.

"*Salt to Dysart*,"

the Scotch form of "*Coals to Newcastle*," has lost

its meaning now the salt pans are abandoned.

"*A puir appearance for Dysart*"

was the exclamation of some drunken sexton when awakened by the side of a grave he ought to have been digging by the mail guard's horn, which he took for the last trumpet, and himself for the only representative of his town. It was recalled to the writer by a Highland shepherd, who told the tale that when wintering his sheep in Fife he found a very well dressed man asleep by a ditch side. It was the time of an election, and after the drunkard was roused from his slumbers, he could only say—"I am a *Lee*beral, I am a *Lee*beral." Was this *in vino veritas*, or the opposite, like the London medical student who, on a similar occasion, informed the police he was Mr Wilberforce. Whatever way you take it, let us hope it will never become a proverb. Fife has indeed no political proverbs, though Kinross has the celebrated non-political one—

"*Happy is the man who belongs to no party,*
Who sits in his ain house and looks at Benarty."

This declaration is more likely to have been made

by Malcolm of Loch Or, an old Kinross laird who lived at the time of the French Revolution, when thrones were shaken and British parties split asunder, than by Sheridan, who has sometimes been credited with it as an impromptu uttered when he was on a visit to Blairadam.

Dysart did not confine itself to salt, and a rhyming proverb runs—

> "*Dysart for coal and saut,*
> *Pathhead for meal and maut,*
> *Kirkcaldy for lasses braw,*
> *Kinghorn for breaking the law.*"

Kinghorn, for what reason is not clear, perhaps because it was the poorest of the Royal Burghs of the East Coast, seems to have had a bad name in those days of old proverbs, for another lame rhyme goes—

> "*Kinghorn for cursing and swearing,*
> *Burntisland for curing herring.*"

But as Burntisland no longer cures, it may be hoped Kinghorn no longer curses. Nor was the place better thought of than the people. The fishers despised its bay for its poverty in fish, and said of it—

"*Kinghorn Blind* (*i.e.*, an enclosed bay); *a muckle dish and little in it*,"

or as another prosaic form has it—

"*It's like Kinghorn, nae muckle worth.*"

Its better behaved neighbours declared its sins in the lines—

"*Here stands a kirk without a steeple,*
A drucken priest and a graceless people."

And the passenger seems to have fought shy of its ferry, for it was said,

"*There's mony speir the road for Kinghorn and ken it a' the way to Pettycur.*"

Or was this a jest at the kind of people we all know who go about asking useless questions?

"*They keep open house at Kinghorn*,"

was said when its houses had fallen into decay and let in as guests the wind and the rain. There is nothing, of course, in Kinghorn of the present day to justify these gibes, which its monument to the good King Alexander III. and new golf course have, we may hope, banished for ever.

No one from Kinghorn has for long appeared at the bar of the Criminal Court for any serious breach of the law.

Most proverbs, especially local ones, are, as these examples show, satirical and often slightly malicious, but they occasionally pay compliments, as in the well-known lines—

> "*The canty carls o' Dysart,*
> *The merry lads o' Buckhaven,*
> *The saucy kimmers o' Largo,*
> *The bonny lasses o' Leven.*"

The original of this was a boat song which Burns honoured by copying—

> "Up wi' the carls o' Dysart,
> And the lads o' Buckhaven,
> And the kimmers o' Largo,
> And the lasses o' Leven."
>
> "Hey ca' thro', ca' thro'
> For we hae muckle to do."

The last lines were the refrain of the singers as they kept time to the tune with their oars.

They remind us of the still finer lines of Hugh Ainslie's song "The Rover of Loch Ryan"—

> "We have rowed thro' a heavier sea, my boys,
> And we'll row thro' a heavier yet."

The lads of Buckhaven were perhaps merry because they had little to do with books, and to be bred at the

"College of Buckhaven"

was even a byword for an ignorant man. It referred to the old schoolhouse, which still stands, and may have been the school where "Wise Willie" and "Witty Eppie" got their learning. The Buckhaven fishers, however, knew their own business, and prospered in it. It was said in the beginning of last century that there was not a poor man in the village. They have kept up this character now that they are more learned by building their harbour at their own cost without borrowing. Why the Leven lasses were preferred to those of Largo, or why Dysart had only canty carls and no merry lads, it would be rash to conjecture. There is a longer rhyme which commemorates the young ladies of the East Coast fishing towns:—

"The lasses o' the Ferry (Earlsferry),
They busk braw;
The lasses o' the Elie,
They ding a';
The lasses o' St Monans,
They curse and ban;

The lasses o' Pittenweem—
They do the same;
The lasses o' Anster,
They drink strong yill;
There's green grass in Cellardyke
And crabs in till Crail."

Crail still claims to have the best crabs on the coast. It is the last of the sea towns distinguished by many proverbs, though a few others may be gleaned.

St Andrews has apparently no proverbs, unless we may credit it with

"*The reek of Patrick Hamilton infects all it blows on.*"

The quaint burgh of Crail has some sayings to mark its out of the world character.

"*A Crail capon*"

was a haddock smoked in the chimney lum—the most plentiful kind of food in that remote quarter, of which it is related that one Fife man asked another whether he had been abroad, who replied,

"*Na; but I ance kent a man who had been to Crail.*"

"*Crail play*"

at whist, to lead Ace King in succession, is the same as "Paisley play," in like manner looked down upon by Glasgow players. It was a mode which the more skilful new-fashioned players of Anstruther and Pittenweem despised.

The sea has its proverbs, mostly sad, as the well-known warning—

"*Betwixt the Oxcar and the May*
Many a ship has been cast away;"

and the directions for a voyage from Queensferry to the Tay were summed up in the lines—

"*Inchcolm, Inchkeith,*
The twa Mickeries and Craigleith,
The lofty Bass and the Isle of May,
Round the Car and in the Tay."

The North Coast has fewer small towns, so fewer proverbs, but the neighbourhood of Newburgh has preserved some, which have a more ancient taste than those of the East. Its school boys still cry,

"*Gey to Hackle Birnie,*"

from "Hackel-barend," the Norse spirit of the storm

(Laing's "Lindores," p. 378), and their elders still repeat to each other,

"*The bells of the Abbey will aye be gotten rung.*"

This warning that every place can be easily filled up is said to have originated as a reflection on a bumptious bellringer of Lindores who thought himself indispensable. It is remembered now in its transferred meaning when there are neither Abbey nor bells. It is the local counterpart of many similar sayings, as the classic line—"*Uno avulso non deficit alter aureus;*" or the English proverb, "*There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.*"

"*He that can do no better must needs be a monk*"

is a saying ascribed by tradition to the ninth Earl of Douglas, and probably a proverb before his time, when sent to end his days as a prisoner in the Abbey, and, though doubted by modern historians, seems consistent with the character of the proud baron who had defied the king.

There was a scoffing saying about Newport, belonging to the time when its whole population consisted of the ferrymen and their families—

"*Take care what you say about neighbours at Newport.*
They are all Uncles and Aunties and Cousins."

This is a proverb which applies to other places, but its prudent counsel has seldom been followed.

Passing from town to country, several of the Fife proverbs of other districts are weather prophecies, common signs on the universal subject that interests every one, but no class more than an agricultural community, which has to win its livelihood in a changeable climate. Such is the rhyme of the East Coast—

> "*When Largo Law the mist doth bear,*
> *Let Kellie Law for storms prepare;*"

or another of the Central districts—

> "*When Falkland Hill puts on his cap,*
> *The Howe of Fife will get a drap;*
> *And when the Bishop draws his cowl,*
> *Look out for wind and weather foul;*"

both of which recall other proverbs of the mist, as

> "*Mist on the hills weather spills;*
> *Mist in the howes, weather grows.*"

or

> "*When Monimail Hill puts on its hat,*
> *The Buchan Howes will pay for that;*"

or

"*When the mist comes to the hills,*
Ye'll get water for your mills;
When the mist comes from the sea,
Fair weather it will be."

The cold weather of the high ground inland from the East Neuk, and swept by winds both from the Forth and the sea, has been reflected in proverbs, as in the rhyme—

"*Ladoddie, Radernie, Lathockar, and Lathone,*
Ye may saw wi' gloves aff, and shear wi' mittens on."

It was probably to the soil of this locality that the description refers,

"*It greets a' winter and girns a' simmer.*"

So Carnbee has got the epithet of *cauld* in the saying,

"*Cauld Carnbee, cauld Carnbee,*
Little meat and ill-paid fee,"

though there are warm houses near it. But the close of it, sometimes varied to

"*Meikle wark and little fee,*"

is now obsolete. Yet even this inclement district has sheltered places, for

"Blaw the wind where it likes,
There's bield about Pitmilly dykes."

The floods as well as the winds are the farmer's foes, and a useful warning is given to those whose lands lie along the Ore after it joins the Lothrie in the lines—

"Colquhally and the Sillerton,
Pitcairn and Dowhill,
Should clean their haughs ere Lammas spates
The Ore begins to fill."

Those who live lower down the stream are more obscurely admonished of the need of an early harvest by the verse—

"Lochtie, Lothrie, Leven, and Ore,
Rin a' through Cameron Brig bore,"

or, as it has been altered to commemorate a local worthy, perhaps the miller at Cameron Bridge,

"A' meet at Johnny Wishart's door."

That worthy rejoiced to sell his napkin of land for a good price, because he did not wish to lose the proverb.

Sometimes such lines become mere jingle without any apparent meaning, but which sing in the head

and please by their quaintness. If any one despises them, those of another opinion have Sir Walter Scott on their side, with whom, Chief Commissioner Adam relates, the following Kinross-shire rhyme of the Ochils was a favourite—

"*Locharnie and Locharnie's Moss,*
The Lonten Stane and Dodgill's Cross,
Craigencat and Craigencrow,
Craigarnie, King's Seat, and Duncrow."

With which we may match the Fife one—

"*Lundy Mill and Largo,*
The Law and the Loch,
Pittenweem and Anster,
Crail and Croch,
Auchindenny, Clackindenny, an' Balmain,
And Pitcarnie stands alane."

There is another of the localities in the Cupar neighbourhood—

"*Baldernie and Blebo Hill,*
Callange, Kinninmonth, and Pitscottie Toll,
Talla-bout and Thomas-toun, Tarvit and Whitehill,
Rumgally and Pitscottie, Dura and Newmill."

If they do nothing more, such lines preserve old

names and their pronunciation, and ought not to be neglected by students of dialect and etymology.

Some of these place lines are more plain-spoken than polite, as—

> "*Carriston and Preston,*
> *Kirkforthar and the Drums,*
> *Were four as crabbed gentlemen*
> *As ever spak wi' tongues;*"

or, as it was sometimes altered—

> "*Were four as greedy farmers;*"

So too

"*Lundie Mill and Largo, the Kirkton and the Keirs,*
Pittenweem an' Anster are all big leears,"

must have had a temporary personal application.

One variety of saying consists of cracks or humorous exaggerations, or big lies as the author of the last lines might have called them, a kind of wit in which our American kinsmen are now the chief masters. Such was the saying of David Lindsay of Wormiston to an Anglo-Indian, who was drawing the long bow,

"*When I was in India I swallowed an oyster as big as a Leith smack.*"

Another kind expresses an impossibility, as one on the goldfields of Fife—

"If Balmain cock doesna craw,
And if Tammie Norrie his horn doesna blaw,
I'll show ye the gold mine on Largo Law;"

or the Fife version of the Greek Kalends, a date which never came—

"When the Bass and the Isle of May
Meet together on Mount Sinai,"

which is from Sir David Lindsay's poems.

There are a few proverbs connected not with places, but with persons, worth quotation and a word of comment.

"You'll no find that in Davy Lyndsay"

was a proverb of the time when the works of the Lyon King were the secular Bible of the people of Fife.

It is singular that so few proverbs are to be found in Lyndsay's poems, although his own name became proverbial, and many passages of his works were frequently quoted.

"Although the loon was weel awa'
The deed was foully done,"

though often cited as a saying of Lyndsay, is not in his published works. Such proverbs as are to be found in them are of older date, as one which was verified in his life-time—

"*I see right well that proverb is full true,*
Wo' to the realm that has owre young ane King."

And another—

"*Hie'est in Court, neist the widdie*"

—*i.e.*, nearest the gallows, of which he says, "This proverb is of the verity the quilk I heard red intill ane letter."

Both he and Dunbar cite the ancient proverb of

"*Blind Alane looking at the moon,*"

the explanation of which is lost. The saying that bishops who did not preach were

"*Dumb dogs,*"

which Knox adopted, was perhaps original, and so probably was one already quoted of the meeting of the Bass and Isle of May on Mount Sinai.

"*Wha labours nocht he sall not eat,*"

is translated from the Vulgate of St Paul's Epistle.

"*Ane sair saint for the Crown*"

was said by James the First of David the First when he saw Dunfermline, but became current from Lyndsay's quotations of it in "The Satyre of the Three Estates."

The Stuart Kings seem to have had a turn for proverb-making, perhaps derived from their residence in Fife. James III. died exclaiming,

"*I was your King this mornin'.*"

James IV. was the author of the inconsistent saying,

"*Do weil and sit not by deeming,*
For no man sall undeemit be."

James V. died at Falkland with a proverb in his mouth,

"*It came with a lass and it will go with a lass.*"

The lass who was to wear the Crown did not make any proverb in the vernacular, though she was to be the occasion, or give the occasion for the application of more than one, as

"*They never get luck who come to Loch Leven,*"

and

"*Better women weep than bearded men.*"

But, as was natural in one bred abroad, she preferred foreign proverbs. She embroidered, perhaps at Loch Leven, a bed of State, with "Impresas" (mottoes) and emblems, wrought with gold and silk, of which Drummond of Hawthornden sent a full description in a letter to Ben Jonson—a good precedent for the sport of proverb hunters, in which the two poets seem to have taken equal pleasure. These mottoes or devices are all Latin, French, or Italian, most of them glancing at her own fate. They are too many for quotation, but one or two may be selected and translated.

"*Hares insult the vanquished lion,*"

alluding to her captivity.

"*She bore ane, but a lion,*"

to her only son.

"*In my end lies my beginning,*"

the motto of her mother, Mary of Guise, which seems to be, as explained by its emblem, a phœnix rising from the flames, a version of the Latin "Mors Janua Vitæ." The Scottish Solomon did not prove

a lion, but, as was fitting, he was the author of many proverbs, of which those relating to Fife have been already quoted.

A few other proverbs of persons less than royal deserve notice.

"*We are a' John Thomson's bairns*"

referred to some popular individual, a master of the games, the feast, or the hounds. Certainly John Thomson was a Fife man, though not the same as appears in another proverb—"*To be John Thomson's man*"—which Fergusson tells us was said of an effeminate person, and Dunbar, nearly a century before Fergusson, applied to James IV. when he wished he was more under the influence of his wife, Margaret Tudor. John is said in the latter proverb to stand for Joan, but both appear to be sayings whose origin is lost, which has the advantage of allowing us to put our own meaning into them.

There is a good one credited to Miss Wood of Elie, a descendant of the great Admiral of Largo—

"*I like a' things weil*,"

said Maggie Wood of the Elie,

"*But gude things best*,"

a capital summary of optimistic philosophy. Some inveterate bachelor must have been the author of the Fife verdict on matrimony—

" They say in Fife,
That next to nae wife,
The best thing is a guid wife."

It is the canny but unsatisfactory verdict of not proven.

The ploughmen at the hiring fairs had rhymes to denote their likes and dislikes for particular farms or farmers, and the fare they got from their masters, as in the jingle, which had many alterations to suit the case, of which the best known form describes the fairs of the West district—

" Witches in the Watergate,
Fairies in the Mill,
Brosy lads o' Newiston,
Can never get their fill.
Sma' drink in the Punful,
Crowdie in the kirk,
Grey meal in Boreland
Waur than ony dirt.
Bread and cheese in the Easter Mains,
Cauld sowens in the Wester Mains,

Hard heads in Hardeston,
Quakers in the Pow;
The braw lasses o' Abdie
Canna spin their ain tow."

Or another of the Eastern district—

"*The new toun o' Balchristie,*
Balcarras and the Brough,
Cauldstream and Cuffaboot,
Dirt-pat Ha';
Burnhead and Ethernie
Stand abune them a'."

These are places within two miles of Leven, and the rhyme very well describes their relative positions.

The situation of the farms in the Western parishes of Dunbog and Moonzie is denoted in the lines—

"*Bambreich stands heich, Higham in a howe,*
Glenduckie in a dub, and Monzie on a knowe."

Moonzie has another rhyme about its kirk—

"*Gae ye east or gae ye wast,*
Or gae ye any way ye will,
Ye will not get to Moonzie kirk
Unless ye galop up the hill."

But Clackmannan has the prettiest rhyme of places,

"Oh! Alva woods are bonnie,
Tillicoultry hills are fair;
But when I think o' the bonnie braes o' Menstrie
It makes my heart aye sair."

The same County has an apt saying for a changeable character—

"Soon het, soon cauld, like a Culross girdle,"

referring to the staple manufacture of that burgh, the iron girdle, which supplanted those of fireclay formerly in use.

"Be stuffy; an ye dinna be stuffy, be as stuffy as ye can,"

was the advice so often given by an old Dunfermline farmer to his men that they called him "Old Stuffy."

The children of the cottagers have many rhymed sayings, one of which may have a place for the old words it preserves—

"Curly doddy, do my bidden,
Soop my hoose and shool my midden."

The colliers, we may be sure, have many proverbs, but I have only got one—

"*A collier is toom a fortnicht before his meat,*"

alluding to the custom of buying provisions on a fortnight's credit till their wages were paid.

In many parts of Scotland there were sayings, generally satirical, about particular families or clans, but there are few of these connected with Fife, in which the clan system early disappeared, and even great families were often dispersed. The only ones of this kind in Fife, perhaps, are

"*The Light Lindsays,*"

which is not a disparaging epithet as might appear, but an allusion to their agile conduct at Otterburn.

"He chose the Gordons and the Grahams,
With them the Lindsays light and gay."

. . . . . .

"The Lindsays flew like fire about
Till a' the affray was done."

"*Ask no questions of the Leslies*"

is a darker saying. Does it refer to the question which the ill-fated Cardinal put to Norman Leslie before he received the answer of the dagger still preserved at Rothes? His own family have an

epithet almost proverbial from traits of beauty, which have come down to the present time—

"*The Beatons' blue eyes and golden hair.*"

But these are said to have been derived not from the Beaton blood, but from the marriage of John Beaton, second laird of Creich, with a daughter of John Hay, Provost of Dundee, a cadet of the Hays of Naughton.

The proverbs of Fife, like its poetry, are as a rule comic, satirical, pungent, seldom tender or pathetic. They do not often rise high or go deep. They are rather chance shafts, which, taking flight at a happy moment, have hit the target and scored a mark. Occasionally, but rarely, they have been more, and express a pathetic or imaginative truth in a form worthy of a poet. Such is the saying,

"*The mouse should not leave the awmry with a tear in her e'e;*"

or the expression of the proud poverty of an old man whose talk, my informant told me, was largely made of proverbs, and who had lost his only son—

"*I'll tie mine ain hose wi' mine ain gartans,*"

and

"*Sell the coo to bury Tammie.*"

Such is the well-known proverb which James Ballantyne expanded into a song—

"*Ilka blade o' grass keps its ain drap o' dew.*"

Miss Stirling Graham of Duntrune, when introduced to Ballantyne, drew him to the light, saying, "I should like to see the man who wrote that line," but Ballantyne modestly disclaimed the authorship, and told her it was a Fife proverb. Its reverse has also found a proverbial form in the East Neuk, and, like it, been turned into a song—

"*Ilka door step has its ain slippy stane.*"

It is no discredit to the song-writer that the proverb is better than the song, carrying a fuller meaning in fewer words. It would spoil a saying as true to nature as to the more cheerful view of life to put the former, the finest of all the proverbs of Fife, into a prosaic version. Who does not when he hears it see the dewy lawn on a morning in May, and recall the text that "not a sparrow falleth to the ground" without the will of the Almighty.

FINIS.

"Every one is a friend of the end."—SPANISH PROVERB.

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